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Steps to Christ revisited

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STEPS TO CHRIST REVISITED



There are many biographies of well-known people who explain how reading a particular book had a profound effect on their lives and destinies. For Martin Luther, it was his reading of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans that dramatically changed his life and led to his insights into justification by faith. John Wesley recalled that his moment of religious awakening occurred one evening when he happened to enter the chapel of some Moravian friends in London where he listened to someone reading the preface of Luther's commentary on Romans. Somehow, this was what Wesley needed to hear to revive his faith in God and his hope of salvation. That moment, listening to the reading of a book's preface, changed his life, gave him hope, and restored his faith.

Adventist pioneer William Miller had a similar experience in the summer of 1816 while reading a sermon to his Baptist congregation. Somehow, what had escaped him for many years, now impressed him profoundly. Through this experience, he became a different man. His spiritual experience started a movement that led to the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist church and the conversion of a young teenager by the name of Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White).

Through the centuries, many people have experienced similar religious awakenings by reading good books.

For me, this experience came about forty years ago. That little book was the first Adventist book I read. I was sixteen years old. This book was the beginning of a spiritual journey that has lasted four decades. I was a high school student and nominally Catholic, and I had been watching the Seventh-day Adventist *Il est écrit (It Is Written)* television program on my local station in Quebec City, Canada. For months, I watched this program as faithfully as I could each Sunday. After one of these broadcasts, I requested a brochure on what the Bible teaches about death and the afterlife. I still have that small pamphlet, the first of a series of Bible study guides from Amazing Facts. Before I received the next pamphlet, a representative from the program came to my home to visit and to answer any questions I had about the Bible. It was a brief visit, but before leaving, Daniel Rebsomen, the pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Quebec City, gave me a paperback edition of a little book with a picture on the cover of Jesus knocking on a door. That's how I got acquainted with *Vers Jésus (Steps to Christ)*.

Since then, I have reread it many times. It has shaped my understanding of God's love for me, my salvation in Jesus in spite of my failings, and my need for spiritual growth. For years each morning, I recited White's suggested prayer: "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 70).

Steps to Christ is a Seventh-day Adventist classic that has been translated into well over 150 languages and has been sold or distributed in the millions. It is obvious that Seventh-day Adventists love this little book.

For its 125th anniversary, in 2017, I prepared a special annotated edition of *Steps to Christ*. This edition was the result of many years of reflection on the content of this deeply spiritual book. In it, Ellen White clarifies and expounds on many essential thoughts regarding God's plan of salvation for humanity and how people can personally experience this salvation.

This anniversary edition coincided with the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, which is traditionally considered to be the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. While White's and Luther's documents are far apart in content and intent, Adventists owe much to Luther for their understanding of salvation in Christ through faith, for a focus on the Scriptures as the only source of truth and guidance for spiritual life, and for understanding the love of God for humanity. The Lutheran Reformation is thus also part of our shared spiritual heritage.

No other book by Ellen White has been turned into this kind of annotated copy, making it a groundbreaking publication which I hope will be repeated for her other books. An introduction gives a brief history of the book, discusses the controversy over the preparation of its manuscript, and describes how Ellen White and her assistants prepared and compiled her books from prior publications. I hope this information will be helpful in correcting some misunderstandings and to dissipate some misguided views about her inspiration and the purpose of her books. The introduction also gives a historical and theological summary of Ellen White's understanding of salvation.

Each of the thirteen chapters has a brief introduction, which includes a list of recommended further reading and a brief description of the antecedents of that chapter. Each chapter also includes some annotations to clarify or expand some of the thoughts expressed in the chapter.

In the appendix, this edition provides something never published before: a list of all known antecedent references to Ellen White's writings used by Marian Davis to compile this book. As explained in the introduction, Adventists have known for a long time that White's books published after 1880 are compilations and adaptations, for the most part, of her prior publications, but we never knew much about the extent or the intricacy of this process. The recent electronic publication of all of Ellen White's published books, articles, and unpublished letters and manuscripts has been an essential tool in this research. And I'm sure more will be done in the future.

Whether one is a long-time admirer or a first-time reader of Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*, this edition will give a new look at this classic of Adventist literature.

One of the beautiful aspects of the book is the conversational tone Ellen White uses to reach out to her readers. It's as if she were speaking to the reader in the living room and making earnest appeals. Here's one that I love very much on the experience of faith and trust in God's word to us:

"In like manner, you are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You believe that promise. You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 51). **RMC**

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